
THE DEEP DESIRE TO BE KNOWN

BY MICHAEL CARD

We first meet her in Genesis 16. She is an Egyptian servant in Abraham's well-off world. We will see her used and abused by Sarai, her mistress. She will always end up either running away or being driven off into the wilderness. Her name is Hagar and she carries deep inside her heart a hunger we all secretly share.

When her baby, Ishmael, is finally known to be on the way, the reward for her submission to Sarai's manipulative and faithless behavior is abuse. (16:6b) And so Hagar does what we see her constantly doing in Genesis, what you and I also constantly are doing, she runs away. She carries within her all that she really owns, her unborn baby, Ishmael. She wanders out into the desert on the road to Shur.

But she is not really alone, even as we can never really be. The angel of the Lord meets her near an as yet nameless spring and asks, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" It is a basic question we should still be constantly asking ourselves. She honestly opens her heart to the angel, "I'm running away..." she defiantly whispers through her tears.

The angel tells the frightened girl to do the last thing in the world she wants to do, return to the abuse from which she has fled. In the language of poetry, he promises her that there is more going on than she can see, more than she can possibly know. It is a heartbreakingly beautiful picture, the angel singing a song of hope in the desert to a hopeless pregnant girl.

As the angel finishes his song (vvs. 11-12), Hagar abruptly responds to the angel who knew her name. She speaks to God a new name, "Lahai Roi" "The One who sees me." In her fear, hopelessness and despair, God met her in the wilderness with His perfect provision. It was all she really needed or wanted. She wanted simply to be seen, and the God who sees, saw her and sang to her a song of hope.

After a six year pursuit, my wife Susan finally responded to my courtship by telling me that she felt I was the first person to really see her. It was only

then that I realized inside myself how much I needed her to really see me too. Twice, the gospels tell us, Peter is "intensely gazed at" by Jesus. (John 1:42, Luke 22:61) That is, Simon Peter becomes aware that Jesus can see to the heart of who he really is, a man so fatally flawed, and yet still love and even die for him. It must have been the first time for Simon to sense that he was so completely known. Later in Acts, Peter really sees the need of a crippled beggar. It is not healing he needs so much as Jesus. And so the "seen" disciple, who has learned to really see the heart, gives to the beggar both healing and Jesus.

"Where have you come from and where are you going?" the angel asks us all. Have you come from a world that has shown you only abuse and blindness to who you are? And are you now in headlong flight from intimacy and genuine relationship, having tried to give up on the hope of ever being truly known? Then what hope could you possibly have had? And where are you going? Back into that same sightless, heartless world? What hope could you possibly look forward to in such a world? We constantly ask for provision when what we need is the clear-sighted Presence of Jesus. We sense His gaze on our lives, and we reflexively turn away from being so lovingly seen, our souls so leprous and untouchable. But His gaze is relentless.

The things we ask for in prayer are almost certainly not what we really need. We need most to be seen, to be understood for better or for worse for who we are. This deep desire is one of the evidences for our being created for relationship with God. Would He give us this profound longing and not perfectly fulfill it by loving us so unconditionally in Christ?

Ask for the grace to look into your deepest longing. You may be in the desert. You may have given up on ever being seen at all. But let me tell you, as one who has been found again and again in the wilderness, there is an Angel of the Lord who is prepared to sing you a song. He asks where you have been and where you are going, already knowing the answers to both questions. It is almost as if He wants to give you the sacred space to respond to the question He already knows. It is as if you need to hear yourself say how bad it was where you've been and how hopeless it is where you are going. Only then will you be ready to hear His song of hope sung to you. Only then will you be ready to drink from the Living Spring of the One who sees you. For, after all, there is a Savior who sees all that is unlovable and yet still loves perfectly, completely, sacrificially. And there is a God who knows you and me more than we know ourselves. ✍

